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Motivation can make e-biz fly

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There is one thing that is missing in all the talk about e-biz and the digital age, and that is the word "motivation."

Go into any bookstore, and you'll find plenty of books on how to get motivated, how to motivate others, and how to become a motivator. Attend a conference, and chances are that you will listen to a "motivational speaker" at some point. There is lots of change going on, and as last week's column alluded to, there are plenty of people who are resistant to change for a variety of reasons.

To get them off their duff, they've got to be motivated, plain and simple.

There are many ways to bring the motivational concept into the world of e-business. First off, companies that are busy implementing e-biz strategies should include some simple motivation to try to speed along their acceptance.

Certainly Air Canada and US Airways get this fact. Air Canada offers bonus Air Miles if you use one of their new "airport kiosks" to check in, while US Airways offers points if you forgo a monthly paper statement and look at your frequent flyer miles on-line. For both organizations, the more that people use these systems, the more the airlines save money, so motivating consumers is in their interest.

Other organizations need to think like that. In the next few months, Canadians are going to be bombarded with the message that they should begin using one of the new e-billing systems that are becoming available. Your bank, telephone company, light and power companies will be begging you to go and pay your bills on-line. Now, there is a huge reason why they want you to do this: It is going to save them significant sums of money. But I don't think many of them are planning to motivate you — and they should. Offer a discount, or some other small "something," and they would likely see their adoption rates go up.

Motivation isn't important only with customers — it is important with staff. In the corporate sector, many companies must take more time to realize that there is a big motivational factor to their efforts to roll out an e-biz application.

I recently spent some time with a company that was in the midst of encouraging its customers to adopt an on-line procurement process. After all, both the customers and the company would enjoy the cost savings that come about through the gradual elimination of old, paper-based ways of doing business.

Yet there was one problem with the effort: Many members of the sales force were not motivated to encourage participation in the system and indeed were suspicious. Their attitude was that if they got customers to do their own orders electronically, they wouldn't be needed. Hence, if they supported the new e-biz initiative, they'd be out of a job, or so went their thinking.

That wasn't the goal. The idea was that if they could be freed up from the routine day-to-day paperwork, they'd have more time to work with the customer and sell. But they didn't understand that.

So, we organized a session that explained the objectives to them, and laid on a heavy motivational message to help them realize that it was in their interest to participate.

That type of thing is going to be increasingly common, since companies are discovering that while the technology of e-biz is straightforward, the people present a difficult challenge. Motivation will be one of the keys to success.

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